

Surgeon General's Conference on the
Prevention of Preterm Birth

PSYCHOSOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL WORKGROUP

Co-Chairs

Dawn Misra, Ph.D.

University of Michigan

Lynne Messer, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Environmental Protection Agency



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Key Issues

- Needs identified in research, screening, and clinical care should be addressed in a timely fashion
- Research and services for African Americans are a priority because they bear the highest burden of prematurity
- Research on the effects of race, racism, and social injustice is a priority

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Short-term Goals

- Develop a Blue-ribbon panel for studying stress—definition, conceptualization, measurement, and biological correlates—in prematurity research
- Invest in the collection and analysis of data that enables high quality evaluation of existing large-scale intervention programs

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Short-term Goals

- Improve the measurement of psychosocial and behavioral risk factors
 - Achieve consensus on gold standards of measurement for research
 - Promote consistency in measures used for screening of these risk factors

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Short-term Goals

- Maximize use of existing data to better understand psychosocial and behavioral determinants of preterm birth
- Analyze potential barriers to care for identification and management addressing psychosocial and behavioral risk factors

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Mid-term Goals

- Determine what drives individual decision making on health behaviors along the life course and develop interventions that target that decision-making process
- Promote community-based participatory research on preterm birth, utilizing both qualitative (e.g., ethnography) and quantitative research methods

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Mid-term Goals

- Promote research on nutrition and physical activity interventions
- Improve screening for psychosocial risks and responses
 - Set gold standards for reliable, consistent screening
 - Address identified needs
 - Include high-risk sub-populations

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Long-term Goals

- Shift from a risk-based approach to an assets-based approach to identify protective factors that mediate and alleviate stress and other factors in the pathway to preterm birth

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Long-term Goals

- Develop methods to study preterm birth across the life-course in a multiple-determinants framework
 - Better data infrastructure for longitudinal studies, whether across a woman's reproductive "career" or across generations

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Long-term Goals

- Improve measurement, including methods to assess cumulative and clustered exposures
- Promote study of interactions
- Develop statistical techniques that test causal pathways
- Identify mechanisms for sharing/linkage of neighborhood and individual level data

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Long-term Goals

- Promote research on interventions that go beyond the mother to target the family and/or community, especially fathers, to address psychosocial and behavioral risk factors

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Final Thoughts

- Multiple workgroups produced several identical recommendations (e.g., the need for quality, national-level data)
- The Surgeon General should give these recommendations extra weight when prioritizing actions for implementation